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LEAFLET  
NO. 115

CHARLES SWAIN THOMAS  
NEWTON HIGH SCHOOL

FEBRUARY  
1914

## THE HARVARD-NEWTON COMPOSITION SCALES

Soon after the Hillegas Scale was published in September 1912, Dr. William Setchel Learned, at that time the Joseph Lee Fellow for Research in Education at Harvard University, began, in coöperation with the Department of Education at Harvard and Superintendent F. E. Spaulding and the teachers of Newton, a series of experiments designed to test the practical value of the Hillegas Scale in reducing the extent of variation in the grading of a given set of compositions by a given set of teachers. Fifty papers were graded without the scale. Three weeks later the same teachers graded the same papers by the scale. Dr. Learned at the time summarized the results as follows:

Marking without the scale, the judges assigned to the papers values which varied among themselves from 30% in one case to 85% in another. The average extreme variation of all fifty papers was 58%. When assigned with the scale, the ratings varied from 18% in one case to 73% in another. The average extreme variation was 44%, showing a gain in uniformity of 14%, presumably due to the scale.

The variation of the nine best judgments out of the fifteen, (i. e. the nine ratings grouped about the median value assigned to each paper.) was from 10% to 43%; their average extreme variation was 30%. Using the scale, this variation was reduced to from 7% to 32%, and the average extreme variation to 17%, showing a gain for the scale of 13%.

An analysis of the effects of the scale on the average ratings of the teachers discloses the following: Without the scale, the average ratings of the teachers for the entire fifty themes vary among themselves from 23% to 74%, or 51%; with the scale they vary from 38% to 61% or 23%, showing thus a gain, apparently due to

the scale, of 28%. With the primary group, the reduction of variation in average ratings is slight—24% to 23%; with the grammar group it is greater, 39% to 23%; and with the high school group it is very marked—51½% to 13%. At the same time the average extreme variation in the ratings of the individual papers by the high school group dropped from 49% to 27%. The two closest markers of the high school group rated the papers without the scale with a difference of 9% between their average ratings. The use of the scale reduced this to 2%.\*

The teachers who experimented with this scale were unanimously impressed with the suggestiveness of the work that Dr. Hillegas had done. With commendable industry and with scientific forethought he had constructed a scale that opened the vision to new possibilities. Yet all the teachers of Newton were convinced of the inadequacy of his work. They immediately noted that some of the Hillegas norms are artificial and so far removed from a pupil's ordinary work as to defy comparative rating. Furthermore, of the non-artificial samples (4-10) all but one—possibly two—are on subjects drawn from books, whereas the majority of our school themes are drawn from life. In none of the selected themes is there any reported conversation, and to adjust a composition with much conversation to any one norm of the Hillegas Scale is a sheer mechanical placement rather than a logical decision. Furthermore, the scale is inadequate because it attempts to measure one quality by an entirely different quality. As Professor Holmes of Harvard pointed out at the December 1912 meeting of the Association, we cannot measure light, warmth, and redness on the same rod.

Acknowledging the value of the Hillegas attempt and at the same time realizing the inadequacy of the results, Dr. Learned and Dr. Spaulding and their associates at Newton, proceeded to construct a scale of different design. At once they abandoned the idea of a single scale, and formed their plans for a series of five scales. Those

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\*Leaflet No. 104 of the New England Association of Teachers of English.



five scales are designed to measure efficiency in description, narration, exposition, argumentation, and reproduction.

A few weeks after these plans were agreed upon, and the work well under way, Dr. Learned accepted a position with the Carnegie Foundation. Immediately he was succeeded by Mr. Frank W. Ballou\*, who, in conjunction with Dr. Spaulding and Professor Holmes, has directed the work in the construction of the separate scales.

Inasmuch as these separate scales were designed for use in grading eighth-grade compositions, only eighth-grade compositions were prepared for possible selection in constructing the scale. Moreover, the grading of these compositions was done by eighth-grade teachers, and elementary-school principals. It was assumed that the narrowed and specialized field would yield a product particularly well adapted for practical measurement within that field.

Compositions were accordingly written by practically all of the eighth-grade pupils of Newton on subjects designed for subsequent sorting within the five predetermined forms,—description, narration, exposition, argumentation, and reproduction. Topics were suggested by the teacher, but pupils who preferred might select their own. The papers were written in school, approximately two hours being allotted to the task. Leisurely preparation and leisurely correction were advised in order that the papers might represent each pupil's best unaided work.

With the design of getting the best single composition for the highest place in the scale, each of the ten schools having eighth-grade pupils sent to the director of the experiment from one to three compositions judged by the teacher and the principal to be of highest rank.

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\*From Mr. Ballou's preliminary report—later to be issued as one of the *Harvard-Newton Bulletins*—I have taken, with his consent, all the facts and statistics which are printed in this *Leaflet*. For the deductions and the opinions the Editor is alone responsible.

All of us who have shared in this work of constructing the scale freely admit its incompleteness and its limitations. We cordially welcome suggestions for possible improvement. Such suggestions should be sent to Mr. Frank W. Ballou, 41 Hawthorn Street, Cambridge, Mass.

With the design of getting compositions best suited to the five predetermined types—description, narration, exposition, argumentation, and reproduction—the ten schools were divided into five groups and each group was asked for compositions of a specific type, arranged in order from best to poorest. Group No. 1 furnished the description themes, Group No. 2 furnished the narration themes, and so on, through the five groups and types.

As each group was asked to submit 25% of its total number of papers, there were sent in from twenty-three to twenty-seven samples of each type. It was then decided to select arbitrarily twenty-five of each type for subsequent grading and marking by the teachers. The sets as finally made up included approximately ten “bests” and fifteen others.

When the compositions reached Mr. Ballou the twenty-five deemed most suitable for the description scale were type-written and mimeographed, extreme care being taken to preserve all the errors that the type-writer could duplicate, and thus reproduce the theme as the pupil had written it. The themes were then indiscriminately arranged and serially numbered from one to twenty-five as chance had left them after shuffling.

Sets of these twenty-five description-themes were then sent to twenty-four readers (fourteen eighth-grade teachers and ten grammar-school principals) for independent grading. The following instructions accompanied the sets.

- a. Arrange the themes in a series in order of their merit.
- b. To the theme considered to be the best give the arbitrary rating of 95%.
- c. Rate each of the remaining themes with reference to this standard, giving it a percentage value and entering the same on the sheet provided.

The rankings when tabulated showed great variation, the most marked discrepancy being 43 points, and the average extreme variation being 30.7%.

As the method of selecting the scale is largely a matter of mathematics and considers rather complicated computa-

tions, I shall not go into the matter further than to say that an endeavor was made to select those six compositions which most closely met the arbitrary demarcations of 95%, 85%, 75%, 65%, 55%, and 45%. It was deemed unnecessary for practical grading to go further up or further down the numerical scale. These percentage ranks, it will be observed, correspond to the common ranking by letters,—A, B, C, D, E, and F.

As a further aid in using the scale many of the teachers of Newton wrote comments on the merits and the defects of the scale-compositions, justifying at the same time the comparative worth of a given composition. These comments, edited by a small committee, are appended to the scale-compositions on description which are printed below.\*

No one who has coöperated in the making of this scale thinks of it as final or authoritative. The mathematically exact measurement of composition values is obviously impossible, and the finer distinctions can never be objectively determined. Inasmuch as we are, however, constantly applying some sort of measurement, it is sensible for us to question our methods and correct, if necessary, and if possible, our subjective judgments. It is right to assume that the judgment of the competent many is better than the judgment of the competent one; and if the judgment of the competent many may be discovered and objectively revealed in a specific case, the process may temper the fitful and tether the erratic.

The construction of a scale for the several discourse forms is obviously open to question, for it almost inevitably tends to place a false emphasis upon the value of such a discrimination. Those most intimately concerned in the construction of this Harvard-Newton Scale would strongly disclaim any intention of setting up these discourse forms as a desirable distinction in the pupil's habitual work. The sep-

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\*Only the discription-scale is here printed. Work on the other four scales is almost completed and will be published in the *Harvard-Newton Bulletin*.



arate scales, it is thought, will be of more practical service than a single scale would be.

It is not expected that any experienced teacher will want to make constant, or even frequent use of such a scale. To do so would be dangerous to vital correcting. It is to be used as a convenient reference in case of doubt, and it may tend to curb any tendency toward irresponsible vagrancy.

Our whole attempt, moreover, is tentative. It is merely an honest endeavor to correct a revealed defect in purely subjective judgment. In order that we may improve it we earnestly solicit suggestions from all who are interested.

## THE HARVARD-NEWTON COMPOSITION SCALE FOR DESCRIPTION

No. 1—95%

### A STORM IN A FISHING VILLAGE

It was a cold damp day in November. The sky was a heavy leaden color. In the east a black line stretched across it foretelling the coming of a storm. The houses across the way were dismal shadows,—flat, cold, heartless. A piercing chill penetrated to the bone. The rattle of a grocer's cart or the clatter of a horse's hoofs, seemed cold. The pedestrians were all clothed in black, or else the feeble light made them seem so, and they were cold—everything was cold, cold, cold. An awful loneliness pervaded all. 5

The black line in the east had grown into a cloud and was coming nearer, nearer, over the sea. Suddenly a gust of wind shook the very foundations of the houses, —another, and then a continuous blowing. The howling was horrible. Great sheets of foam were blown into the streets,—here and there a piece of wreckage hurled itself against a cottage. Fishermen's wives hurried down the narrow streets to the shore, straining their eyes for any sign of a wreck. Old seamen looked at the roaring sea and shook their heads. 10 15

By this time the black cloud had engulfed the sky. The day was like night, although it was not yet noon. Boys ran about with torches which were immediately extinguished, and the roaring called to mind the last day at Pompeii. 20

Rain had begun to descend. At first only drops fell 25  
on the hardened faces of old mariners, and on the pale  
countenances of wives, mingling with the drops already  
there. But soon great sheets fell, forcing the people  
indoors, to the poor shelter afforded by the groaning  
houses. 30

For about an hour the storm continued thus, then by  
degrees the wind lessened, though the rain still fell, and  
the ocean thundered. But soon the rain also slowly  
stopped and the roaring ceased. The black cloud rolled  
slowly away, leaving the tardy sun to shine on the 35  
drenched town and the great piles of wreckage on the  
shore.

**MERITS** This theme ranks high because the writer has a clear  
picture of the scene and has used words and phrases  
that bring the details of this picture clearly before the  
reader. There are good color images in such expressions as *leaden*,  
*a black line*, *great sheets of foam*, *the day was like night*, and *the*  
*sun shining on the drenched town*. Sound effects are strikingly  
brought out by such phrases as *the rattle of a grocer's cart*, *the*  
*howling*, *the wreckage hurled against the cottage*, *the roaring sea*,  
and *the thundering ocean*. The sensation of dreariness and chill  
is conveyed by the repetition of the word *cold*. The confusion  
caused by the storm is reflected in the anxious look of the wives  
of the fishermen. A further human touch is added in the mention  
of such details as *the extinguished torches carried by the boys* and  
*the drops of rain falling upon the hardened faces of the old mari-*  
*ners*. All these enumerations fittingly combine to produce a tone  
of coldness, desolation, and anxiety. The details are told in their  
natural sequences. This chronological arrangement has helped the  
writer to keep safely to his main point and effectively connect the  
details with each other.

**DEFECTS** The repetition of the word *cold*, while effective in  
bringing out the sensation, is somewhat artificial.  
*Loneliness* (line 9) is misspelled; a semicolon should  
supplant the first comma in line 8. Omit the comma in line 6.

**COMPARISON** The theme is superior to No. 2 in its richness of  
imagery, its wealth of details, its depth of feel-  
ing, its maturity of style, (seen in the sentence-  
structure and the vocabulary), and in its mastery of mechanical  
forms.

No. 2—85%

### GRANDMOTHER

In front of the open fireplace in a large armchair  
there sits our old Granny. She is old and feeble. Her  
hair is snow-white and over her head a little white cap  
is carefully tied. Her face is full of wrinkles and her

keen blue eyes sparkle through a pair of glasses which she has on her nose. 5

She has a shawl thrown over her shoulders and she also wears a thick black skirt. On her feet can be seen a pair of soft slippers which she prizes very much because they were given her for a Christmas present. 10

As you know Grannies always like to be busy our Granny is busy knitting gloves. Her hands go to and fro. She will keep on working until her knitting is done. Now that it is done she carefully folds her work and packs it into her work-basket. Then she trots upstairs to bed and oh, how lonesome it is when our dear Granny is gone from the room. 15

**MERITS** The merits of this composition are: (1) the clear and pleasing impression obtained; (2) the happy choice of details and the logical sequence of their arrangement; (3) the sympathetic treatment of the subject—for example, bits of sentiment seen in the grandmother's attachment to the slippers, and the loneliness felt when she goes to her room; (4) the interesting introductory sentence, and (5) the mechanical accuracy.

**DEFECTS** The defects are: (1) the rather monotonous sentence structure, and (2) the childish vocabulary.

**COMPARISON:** To justify its place in the scale note: (1) that in No. 1 there is successfully treated a much more difficult subject; (2) there is a greater power of imagination; and (3) there is a greater variety of sentence structure and a richer vocabulary.

## NO. 3—75%

### A MANSION

As you look across the road you will first see a long private avenue or walk.

It is in the summer, and on each side of this long walk are some beautiful, stately elms. They are hundreds of years old and they have done their duty for as many years, shading the walk from the noon sun. 5

Cross the road and you will see if you look up the avenue, a beautiful mansion. It is a colonial house and four large pillars are upholding the roof. A piazza runs along three sides of the house. 10

Near the house is a tennis court where for years the occupants of the mansion have passed many an hour.

Let us enter the mansion. It is a beautiful cool



place, although dark. As we enter we see large psalms 15  
on each side of the entrance. On the floors are old  
oriental rugs which have been handed down for gen-  
erations. In the parlor is a harp, and on the walls are  
the portraits of the ancestors. In all, it is a beautiful  
place. 20

**MERITS** The writer of this theme has presented a clear though  
conventional picture. Although he changes his point of  
view several times, he has attempted to put his readers  
into the best positions to see the mansion. The choice of words is  
fair. Such details as the stately elms, the oriental rugs, the harp,  
and the portraits are well selected. Only one mistake in spelling  
occurs (line 15).

**DEFECTS** There are, however, too many paragraphs for such  
a short theme. Constant repetition of the pronoun  
*you*, and of the words *beautiful* and *mansion* give an  
impression of monotony and of limited vocabulary. The pupil has  
evidently a definite place in mind, but has not suggested the spirit  
of the scene, as has the writer of No. 2.

**COMPARISON** The composition deserves its place in the scale  
above No. 4 because of better sentence structure  
and more orderly arrangement. It is inferior to  
No. 2 on account of its somewhat prosaic tone and its constantly  
changing point of view.

## NO. 4—65%

### THE LAKE AT SUNRISE

In the Mountains of Pennsylvania there is a lake.  
On one side of the lake is a boat landing, at which  
a dozen or more boats are tied up. On this boat land-  
ing one may stand and look up the lake, at sunrise, and  
see the sun peering up over the top of the mountains 5  
and shinning on the water. Then a King Fisher flies  
down the lake making his cheerful noise, instantly, all  
the other birds begin to chirp as if their life depended  
on it.

Looking across the lake one would see numerous 10  
wells and coves backed up by woods from which comes  
the chirp of the birds. Hearing the explosions of cyl-  
inders we look to see where in comes from and find a  
pumphouse that keeps the lake supplied with water.

Looking down the lake over the dam to the ice 15  
house with the roof sparkling with. On the roof of the  
house a hawk is sitting adding his clear whistle to noise  
of other birds.

Looking around to the woods, at our back, with an

old oil well in front of them. The birds flying from 20  
the woods in flocks, and far away from the hills comes  
the sound of the of Italians singing.

**MERITS** The writer has seen and heard concrete details and  
has re-created his images clearly. He has tried, too, to  
make his point of view obvious to the reader. His  
vocabulary is adequate.

**DEFECTS** As a description the composition fails because there  
is no unified picture of the lake. The selected details,  
clear in themselves, tend to distract rather than center  
the interest. There are numerous mechanical errors: there should  
be no commas after *lake* or *sunrise* (l. 4); *shining* (l. 6) is mis-  
spelled; there should be a period after *noise* (l. 7), and no comma  
after *instantly* (l. 7), which should commence with a capital;  
in (l. 13), *it* is not correct; the groups of words in (ll. 15, 16), and  
(ll. 19, 20) do not make sentences; the word *the* is omitted before  
*noise* (l. 17) and the word *are* before *flying* (l. 20).

**COMPARISON** The theme merits its rank in the scale by supe-  
riority in spelling, paragraphing, and maturity  
of thought. It does not, on the other hand, show  
equal mastery in the fine details, the discriminating vocabulary, and  
in the ability to stick to the point. The sentence-sense is faulty.

## NO. 5—55%

### A LIGHT HOUSE

A description of a light house is quite interesting.

First a light house is generally situated on a mass of  
rocks in the ocean or on some great lake. And then  
to get into a light house is a question. Some times  
you have to climb to the top on a steal ladder, and again 5  
you only have to go half way up and you find sort of  
a steal porch which is very strong with a door in the  
side of the light house. On the very top of the light  
there is generally two or three life boats in case of  
accidents. In side there is an enormous light which 10  
flashes every two minutes and sometimes more often it  
depends holy on the weather. The man himself has  
very favorable sleeping quarter and food it is a very  
lonely life except when you have a man with you.  
Sometimes they play cards all day long until it is time 15  
to fix the lights and then they are very busy.

**MERITS** The merits of this theme are: (1) the evident spirit  
of faithful accuracy; and (2) a successful use of cer-  
tain simple words,—such as *mass of rocks*, *enormous*  
*light*, and *lonely life*.

**DEFECTS** Many obvious defects warrant its low position in  
the scale. The pupil was asked to write a description.  
After announcing his purpose to do this, he writes an

exposition, or explanation of lighthouses in general. The first sentence of the theme is worthless, contributing nothing toward the development of the subject. It should be omitted. The paragraph is full of misspelled words and grammatical slips; *steal, in side, holy, some times, sleeping quarter*. The most striking weakness of the work is the loose and rambling form of the sentences, indicating indefinite thought. "Run-on" sentences are found in ll. 10-14. No attempt has been made to establish a point of view. On this account, and because of a lack of vivid words, the passage is dead and colorless.

**COMPARISON** The composition is placed above No. 6 because it contains fewer mechanical errors.

### NO. 6—45%

#### A SCENE ON THE PRAIRIES

Along a large plain in the west with mountains on all sides. The sun was just sinking behind the mountains. Some trappers were on the plain just about to get their supper. They had one tend because there was just three of them. Beside their tent tripled a little spring. 5  
After the three trappers had eating there supper they sat down by the fire because it had growing dark. All of a sudden a bunch of Indain's came riding up. When they came near they fired of their guns and disappered in the darkness and the trappers turned into camp leav- 10  
ing one a the trappers on gaurd.

**MERITS** The commendable features of this composition are directness, simplicity, and a logical arrangement of details. The writer passes from the general to the specific in a natural manner. In spite of a change in the point of view in the last two sentences, the paragraph, as a whole, makes a clear picture.

**DEFECTS** Blunders in grammar and in spelling, lack of sentence-sense, and short, childish sentences make the rating of the composition necessarily very low. Such errors as *tend for tent, tripled for trickled, eating for eaten, growing for grown*, and the misspelling of *Indians* indicate either hasty, careless work, or slovenly habits of enunciation.

**COMPARISON** Compared with the descriptions of the storm and of grandmother, the short sentences here show immaturity and weakness rather than skill or force. With a large amount of correcting of mechanical details, but with very little revising as a whole, this paragraph would be superior to No. 5.

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### EDITORIAL NOTES

Even though the foregoing scale was prepared for eighth grade pupils it may nevertheless prove of value in the high schools.



The Spring meeting of the Associations will be held on Saturday morning, March 21. The topic for discussion will be The Training of English Teachers.

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*The Harvard-Newton Bulletin*, mentioned in this issue of the *Leaflet*, is a publication planned jointly by the Department of Education at Harvard University and the Newton Public Schools. By an arrangement between Harvard and Newton, The Joseph Lee Fellow of Research carries on educational experiments at Newton. The results of these experiments are to be published in *The Harvard-Newton Bulletin*. The first number, describing the work done last year by Dr. Learned, is soon to be issued and will be sold to the public.

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In calling the composition scale described in this issue *The Harvard-Newton Description Scale* it is of course understood that the Harvard men who have been associated in the experiment, are connected with the Department of Education, not with the Department of English.

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Again our Association records the loss of one of its most active and most useful members. Mr. Andrew H. Ward of Milton Academy has been associated with us from the start. As the value of these services was particularly well known to Mr. George H. Browne of the Browne-Nichols School we have asked Mr. Browne to prepare the account which follows.

In the death of Andrew Henshaw Ward, this Association has lost one of its charter members and a most loyal, efficient, and genial co-worker. After graduating from Harvard in the class of 1885, he taught four years in and near Boston, at the Cheltenham Academy, Philadelphia, and at the Peekskill Military Academy. He then spent three years at the Harvard Law School and took his LL. B. in 1892. He was admitted to the bar; but he did not practice. After a summer in Europe, he returned in the Fall to take up teaching again at Mr. Knapp's Home School in Plymouth; and in September, 1893, began his fruitful career at Milton Academy in the Classical department.

In July, 1899, he married Miss Margaret Elizabeth May, of Brookline, spent his honeymoon in Europe and returned to the academy to teach English the rest of his life. With his wife and daughter, a Smith College class-baby, he took a Sabbatical in Europe in 1902-3. A second daughter was born in Berlin, and a third in

Duxbury in 1904. During their summer in Temple, N. H., in 1907, his gifted wife translated Fenssen's *Peter Moor's Journey to South Africa*, which was published by Houghton, Mifflin & Co. Three weeks after their son was born in November she died.

Not even this sorrow could dampen his faith or impair his efficiency. He was the founder of the Milton Educational Society, was most active in the Village Improvement Association, served on numerous educational committees, was one of the committee that set examination papers in English for the Board, a delegate to the National Conference on Uniform Examinations in English, Vice-President of the Harvard Teachers' Association, and for many years Secretary of the English Lunch Club, a dynamic score of School and College teachers of English which owes most of its vitality to his long and faithful service.

On September 11, 1912, he married Miss Emily Pauline Locke, of Brookline, whose devotion and consecration have rendered his separation from the family less poignant. The academy gave him leave of absence last year, but the progress of the disease (cancer) could not be checked. His cheerful faith and manly courage in affliction made his influence on the academy boys no less uplifting than when he was working and playing with them. He left his four children in loving hands; and he was laid to rest on January 8, universally mourned as a tender husband and father, a friend and aider of boys, open-minded as well as high-minded, a citizen of public spirit, and a man of rare character and power.

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As our members are all interested in the work of the English Council we are glad to print a summary of a portion of the work accomplished by the Council at the November meeting in Chicago. This summary has been prepared by the Publicity Committee.

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At the third annual meeting of the National Council of Teachers of English which was held in Chicago, November 27 to 29, a series of resolutions offered by Professor Edwin M. Hopkins of the University of Kansas was unanimously adopted. Professor Hopkins, who has been for some years Chairman of the Committee on Labor and Cost of English Teaching, stated that investigations of his Committee show beyond any doubt that highly satisfactory work in English composition teaching cannot be done so long as secondary schools and colleges assign too many pupils to the teacher. The average at present is over 125 in secondary schools and over 100 in colleges. The number could be considerably reduced without raising the cost of English teaching to the level of most of the other subjects.

He therefore moved that:

## I.

The National Council of Teachers of English approves the steps taken by the North Central Association to limit and decrease the number of pupils assigned to English teachers in high schools, and requests the Association and all similar accrediting bodies to recommend for immediate action that schools in which the maximum number of pupils assigned to a single English teacher exceeds one hundred be not accredited in English; and it also requests the Association and all similar accrediting bodies to take further action at as early a date as seems expedient to reduce this maximum to eighty, with due provision, as at present recommended, for necessary time for conference and theme reading counted as teaching time.

## II.

It is the sense of the National Council of Teachers of English that in order to secure satisfactory results in college English it is essential that the maximum number of students in Freshman English Composition assigned to a single instructor should in no case exceed sixty; and that when such an instructor has classes in other subjects, a corresponding reduction should be made in the number of pupils assigned him in English composition.

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